

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
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NOFORN CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS-

TAGS: PFOR, VM, CH, CB

SUBJECT: CAMBODIA IN THE SINO-VIETNAMESE DISPUTE

1. FOLLOWING IS INR ANALYSIS OF JULY 21 FOR YOUR INFORMATION.

2. CONCLUSIONS

CAMBODIA'S XENOPHOBIC LEADERS ARE CONVINCED THAT THEY ARE IN A STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL WITH THEIR POWERFUL VIETNAMESE NEIGHBOR, AND THUS THEY LOOK TO CHINA, THEIR ONLY REAL FRIEND, FOR SUPPORT. VIETNAM NOW SEEMS COMMITTED TO THE DESTRUCTION OF THE POL POT REGIME, AND IT IS QUESTIONABLE HOW FAR THE CHINESE WILL GO TO SAVE IT.

3. REASONS FOR THE CONFLICT

THE PRESENT CAMBODIAN-VIETNAMESE BORDER WAR HAS LONG ANTECEDENTS. THE CAMBODIAN COMMUNISTS SHARE THE TRADITIONAL CAMBODIAN ;OSTILITY TOWARD VIETNAM AND FEAR OF VIETNAMESE DOMINATION.

--IN 1951 THE INDOCHINA COMMUNIST PARTY, ESTABLISHED BY
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HO CHI MINH, SPLIT INTO SEPARATE VIETNAMESE, CAMBODIAN, AND LAO COMPONENTS. A SECRET VIETNAMESE PARTY DIRECTIVE OF THAT TIME STATED THAT HANOI "RETAINS THE RIGHT OF SUPERVISION OVER THE ACTIONS OF THE FRATERNAL PARTIES OF LAOS AND CAMBODIA."

--SINCE THE MID-FIFTIES, HANOI HAS BEEN TRAINING SYMPATHETIC CAMBODIAN COMMUNISTS TO BECOME HANOI'S HENCHMEN IN CAMBODIA.

--AFTER THE FALL OF SIHANOUK IN 1970, HANOI'S ARMED FORCES BOTH FOUGHT IN CAMBODIA AND ORGANIZED A REVITALIZED CAMBODIAN COMMUNIST PARTY APPARATUS. BY 1972, HOWEVER, POL POT, CAMBODIA'S PRESENT PRIME MINISTER AND PARTY SECRETARY, WAS WARY OF HANOI'S OBJECTIVES AND BEGAN THE FIRST OF MANY PURGES TO REMOVE ALL PRO-VIETNAMESE CAMBODIAN CADRE. LIMITED FIREFIGHTS EVEN BROKE OUT BETWEEN VIETNAMESE AND CAMBODIAN COMMUNIST FORCES.

4. IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE 1975 VICTORY, THE CAMBODIAN COMMUNISTS TOOK THE INITIATIVE TO ASSERT SOVEREIGNTY OVER DISPUTED TERRITORY AND RAPIDLY MOVED ARMED FORCES INTO

BORDER AREAS AND OFFSHORE ISLANDS. THE VIETNAMESE RESPONDED WITH AIR AND GROUND ATTACKS AND TOOK POSSESSION OF SEVERAL CONTESTED ISLANDS. FOR THE NEXT TWO YEARS BOTH COUNTRIES SETTLED INTO AN UNEASY RELATIONSHIP, SUPERFICIALLY FRATERNAL, BUT FREQUENTLY PUNCTUATED BY ARMED CLASHES ALONG THE BORDER.

5. THE MILITARY SITUATION

FIGHTING ESCALATED SHARPLY IN THE LATE SPRING AND SUMMER OF 1977, HOWEVER, AND IN DECEMBER OF LAST YEAR VIETNAMESE FORCES ADVANCED INTO EASTERN CAMBODIA ON A LARGE FRONT TO DESTROY KHMER UNITS MENACING VIETNAM'S BORDERS. VIETNAMESE FORCES WITHDREW IN JANUARY 1978 AND REMAINED LARGELY DEFENSE-SECRET

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SIVE THROUGH JUNE WHILE CAMBODIAN UNITS MADE FREQUENT PENETRATIONS INSIDE VIETNAM, SOMETIMES UP TO 30 KILOMETERS.

6. IN JUNE, VIETNAM, FRUSTRATED BY CONTINUING CAMBODIAN ATTACKS, LAUNCHED AIR AND GROUND FORCES ON ANOTHER OFFENSIVE IN EASTERN AND NORTHEASTERN CAMBODIA. VIETNAMESE UNITS NOW OCCUPY SECTIONS OF KOMPONG CHAM, SVAY RIENG, AND RATANAKIRI PROVINCES JUST INSIDE CAMBODIA, BUT CAMBODIAN FORCES HAVE CONTINUED TO COUNTERATTACK VIGOROUSLY AND ARE STILL ABLE TO PENETRATE VIETNAM.

7. THE MOST RECENT VIETNAMESE OPERATION APPEARS TO HAVE LIMITED OBJECTIVES SIMILAR TO THAT IN DECEMBER. IT DIFFERS FROM PAST RETALIATORY ATTACKS, HOWEVER, IN THAT VIETNAM IS CALLING FOR THE OVERTHROW OF THE POL POT REGIME AND IS

TRAINING AND ASSISTING "PATRIOTIC" CAMBODIAN INSURGENTS APPARENTLY OPERATING THROUGHOUT CAMBODIA'S EASTERN REGION.

8. VIETNAM HAS 80,000-100,000 TROOPS DEPLOYED ALONG THE BORDER, WHILE CAMBODIA'S ENTIRE ARMED FORCES MAY NUMBER ONLY 100,000. ALTHOUGH CAMBODIA ACQUIRED LONGRANGE FIELD GUNS FROM CHINA IN EARLY 1978, THERE DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN CHINESE ASSISTANCE IN RECENT MONTHS. ACCORDING TO THE ROMANIAN MILITARY ATTACHE IN PEKING, CHINESE MILITARY PERSONNEL IN CAMBODIA NOW NUMBER 6,300 MILITARY INSTRUCTORS AND ADVISORS (AND AROUND 10,000 MILITARY WORKERS AND ENGINEERS), AND MANY CAMBODIANS ARE UNDERGOING MILITARY TRAINING IN CHINA.

9. VIETNAM'S EFFORTS TO NEGOTIATE

VIETNAM HAS TRIED TO PERSUADE CAMBODIA TO NEGOTIATE THE SECRET

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BORDER DISPUTE AND OTHER COUNTRIES TO BRING PRESSURE ON PHNOM PENH TO ENTER TALKS WITH VIETNAM. ON DECEMBER 31, 1977, WHEN VIETNAMESE TROOPS ENTERED CAMBODIA IN FORCE, CAMBODIA BROKE OFF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS AND PUBLICLY ACCUSED HANOI OF ATTEMPTING A COUP AGAINST THE POL POT GOVERNMENT AND OF WANTING TO INCLUDE CAMBODIA WITHIN A VIETNAMESE-DOMINATED INDOCHINA FEDERATION.

10. ON FEBRUARY 5, 1978, VIETNAM PUBLISHED PROPOSALS FOR A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT:

--AN IMMEDIATE END TO HOSTILITIES;

--WITHDRAWAL OF TROOPS TO FIVE KILOMETERS ON EACH SIDE OF THE BORDER;

--A MEETING TO CONCLUDE A TREATY TO SOLVE THE BORDER PROBLEM; AND

--AGREEMENT ON AN INTERNATIONAL GUARANTEE AND SUPERVISION OF THE BORDER.

11. CAMBODIA REJECTED THIS OFFER AND A SIMILAR ONE IN APRIL. IT COUNTERED THAT VIETNAM MUST WITHDRAW ALL ITS FORCES FROM CAMBODIAN SOIL AND SHOW "GOOD DEEDS" DURING A SEVEN-MONTH COOLING-OFF PERIOD, DURING WHICH TIME PHNOM PENH WOULD EVALUATE HANOI'S SINCERITY. HANOI BRUSHED THIS DEMARCHE ASIDE AS "RIDICULOUS."

12. THE REAL STICKING POINT IS NOT THE BORDER ISSUE BUT PHNOM PENH'S DEMAND THAT HANOI ABANDON ITS AMBITION OF "EXPANSION AND ANNEXATION" DESIGNED TO COERCE CAMBODIA INTO A "SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP" DOMINATED BY HANOI. SINCE HANOI DENIES SUCH A GOAL, THERE IS NOTHING TO TALK ABOUT.

13. PROSPECTS

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THE PHNOM PENH GOVERNMENT APPEARS DETERMINED TO CONTINUE FIGHTING DESPITE VIETNAM'S ARMED SUPERIORITY. FOR ITS PART, VIETNAM, HAVING BEEN FORCED INTO AN INCREASINGLY COSTLY WAR, NOW INTENDS TO USE SUFFICIENT MILITARY AND POLITICAL PRESSURE TO BRING DOWN THE POL POT REGIME. HANOI PROBABLY PLANS TO USE PRO-VIETNAM CAMBODIAN INSUR-

GENTS TO ADMINISTER LIBERATED BASES IN EASTERN CAMBODIA
AND CHALLENGE PHNOM PENH'S AUTHORITY IN OTHER PROVINCES.

14. CHINA MAY WELL INCREASE ITS ASSISTANCE TO CAMBODIA
BUT WILL PROBABLY NOT SEND MAIN-FORCE UNITS INTO EITHER
CAMBODIA OR VIETNAM, IN PART BECAUSE OF CONCERN OVER
SOVIET AND WORLD REACTION. CONSEQUENTLY, CHINA WILL BE
UNABLE TO GUARANTEE THE SECURITY OF THE PRESENT REGIME.

15. AS VIETNAMESE PRESSURE MOUNTS, IT WILL BECOME IN-
CREASINGLY LIKELY THAT ELEMENTS WITHIN THE PRESENT KHMER
LEADERSHIP WILL OVERTHROW POL POT AND MIGHT SEEK AN
ACCOMMODATION WITH THE VIETNAMESE, OR THAT HANOI WILL
ENGINEER A SUCCESSFUL COUP AGAINST HIM.

16. AS THE VIETNAMESE-CAMBODIAN CONFLICT ESCALATES, A
PROBLEM FOR BOTH THE ASEAN STATES AND THE US WILL BE:

--MORE CAMBODIANS FLEEING INTO THAILAND (AND VIETNAM),
PARTICULARLY IF THE AUTHORITY OF THE POL POT GOVERNMENT
BREAKS DOWN; AND

--MORE VIETNAMESE FLEEING THEIR COUNTRY TO AVOID THE DRAFT,
THE CONFLICT, AND HARSH INTERNAL CONDITIONS.

17. THE ASEAN STATES ARE THEN LIKELY TO ADOPT LESS MAG-
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NANIMOUS REFUGEE POLICIES AND TO BECOME MORE INSISTENT
THAT THE US RELIEVE THEM OF THE BURDEN. VANCE

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